

Sustainability in English Language Acquisition: Points to Explore

Suhair Eyad Al-Alami¹

¹ Horizon University College, United Arab Emirates

Correspondence: Suhair Eyad Al-Alami, Horizon University College, United Arab Emirates. E-mail: suhair.alalami@hu.ac.ae.
http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1488-4305

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Abstract:

In a globalized world of constantly challenging demands, the acquisition of English as a lingua franca remains essential. Bearing this in mind, the current paper explores how sustainability in English language acquisition can be emphasized to ensure quality outcomes in the long run. The study, as such, raises two questions: what components should an English as a foreign language (EFL) university course comprise to ensure sustainability in English language acquisition, and what are the specifications of an EFL course, designed to ensure sustainability in English language acquisition? Employing a mixed-methods design, the author of this paper distributed a questionnaire and conducted an interview covering two categories of subjects; namely, EFL instructors and university students. The study findings stress the need to integrate literature, life skills, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), communication skills, environment-awareness education, and human values into English language courses. In addition, the findings highlight several specifications for an EFL course designed to ensure sustainability in English language acquisition, such as utilizing technological advancements, tailoring English courses as per current trends, focusing on students' research projects, encouraging community involvement, conducting co-curricular activities, and implementing Knowledge-Skill-Disposition (KSD)-oriented assessments. The study ends with a proposed framework for scholars to consider.

Keywords: English language acquisition, higher education, language courses, sustainability

1. Introduction

In a globalized world of constantly changing requirements, the acquisition of English as a lingua franca has become a success indicator. Through acquiring English, not only do students possess the skills to communicate with people from around the globe, but they also raise their awareness of globally critical issues such as sustainability. How can we define sustainability? From the author's point of view, sustainability is the ability to maintain a process over time. Relating the discussion to the construct of sustainability in English language acquisition, the author opines that language knowledge and skills, healthy dispositions toward life, awareness of SDGs, and knowledge about sustainability as related to life aspects make up the construct of sustainability in English language acquisition.

As a matter of fact, knowledge of a language, especially a second or foreign one, may fade throughout the years due to several reasons such as lack of exposure to and use of the language and having no reason to use the language regularly. As language educators though, we need to ensure that students maintain the language knowledge and skills which they have learned for lifelong learning (Al-Alami, 2025). In addition, sustainability in English language acquisition is inadequate without acquiring knowledge of critical issues and skill in seeking universally appropriate solutions.

Emphasizing educators' role, this paper aims to offer several fruitful ideas, which could be translated into actions when designing English courses for EFL contexts. To realize the intended aims, this paper explores sustainability considering two points, which as seen by the author, constitute the construct of sustainability in English language acquisition: English language education and sustainability education via English language instruction.

It is worth noting that this study differs from previous research addressing similar issues, as it proposes the integration of English as a foreign language (EFL) education and sustainability education within a single framework, responding to the needs of today's globalized world. Earlier studies have typically either focused on English in general rather than EFL or concentrated on specific aspects of language or sustainability education in isolation. In contrast, the current study simultaneously engages both EFL and sustainability education. Unlike previous studies, this research offers an approach that emphasizes how EFL acquisition can serve as both a medium and a communicative tool for promoting sustainability values, thereby distinguishing it in terms of both relevance and scope. Embedding sustainability within English language acquisition is essential, as it extends learning beyond short-term linguistic mastery to foster long-term skills. By integrating sustainability principles into EFL education, students not only enhance their linguistic competence but also develop awareness of global challenges and contemporary trends.

With the study's aims in mind, this research sought to investigate comprehensive answers to the questions below:

Question One: What components should an EFL university course comprise to ensure sustainability in English language acquisition?

Question Two: What are the specifications of an EFL university course, designed to ensure sustainability in English language acquisition?

Section 2 of the paper is a literature review of the topic this paper depicts. Section 3 highlights the research methods, section 4 displays the findings, and section 5 is the author's conclusion based on both the study's findings and scholars' opinions. The paper concludes with several recommendations along with a proposed framework for researchers to consider.

2. Literature Review

This section is a literature review about the topic this paper addresses. The review comprises several ideas, opinions, and studies on sustainability within language pedagogical contexts. It is worth adding that the review is presented both chronologically and thematically.

To start with, integrating sustainability topics into courses such as language cannot be seen as a new trend. Fill and Muhlhausler (2001) and Hornberger (2002), for instance, explain how integrating the studies of ecology, environment, and language would enrich language learners' knowledge of language, ecology, and environment. With reference to SDGs (UN, 2015), the seventeen goals have been among the concerns of many scholars for several years now.

Whether teaching sustainability-related issues is effective in the English classroom has been receiving scholars' attention (Boeve-de Pauw et al., 2015). Focusing on ecology in particular, Calvert (2015) and Chen (2016) reiterate the need to explore sustainability by examining universal issues in the English teaching context. Language teaching should go beyond the teaching of language elements such as grammar and language skills such as listening, to cover the teaching of essential global concepts such as sustainability. Putri (2018) and Leal Filho et al. (2018), amongst other scholars, argue that English educators should integrate the teaching of sustainability to inspire sustainability-related practices. Several scholars are also of the opinion that focusing on sustainability-related studies such as the environment and relating students' projects to the community needs will be of use to both the students and the community in which they live (Vieira, 2017; Sinakou et al., 2019). Martyushev et al. (2021) believe that sharing Open Educational Resources (OER) would enable English educators to focus on sustainability-related themes and use accessible materials of relevance to the students.

Some scholars (Arslan & Curle 2021; Martin-Garin et al., 2021; Gabaudan, 2022; Xiao, 2022; Ferdous et al., 2022) think that integrating sustainability into English teaching is essential for achieving SDGs. According to Kapranov (2022), sustainability is not limited to teaching environment-related issues. To achieve better results in a sustainable world, sustainability needs to be adopted as a pedagogical approach the aim of which is to empower students with the values, knowledge, and skills that would enable them to function effectively. Romhild and Gaudelli (2022) confirm the importance of including cultural studies in language education for sustainability purposes.

Calle-Diaz (2023), Maijala et al. (2023), and Mambu (2023), amongst others, advocate the idea of integrating SDGs into language curricula and teaching. Meighan (2023) proposes collaboration at the interdisciplinary level to incorporate the concept of sustainability into language teaching, emphasizing that sustainability-related topics can enrich language education. Collaboration between language educators on the one hand and subject matter educators on the other should incorporate sustainability-related topics to complement the aims of language education. According to Moulieswaran & Kumar (2023), using language education as a springboard to leverage awareness of environmental issues would be beneficial. Bilsborough (2023), amongst others, stresses the need to incorporate sustainability-related concepts into English curricula, arguing that the earlier efforts are made and decisions are taken in this regard, the better our future will become. Likewise, Fu (2023) and Wang & Zhang (2023) underscore the idea of embedding SDGs into English language teaching, proposing the employment of a holistic approach to achieve language and universal goals.

More recently, several scholars (Yu et al., 2024; Buller & Waters, 2024) urge educators to integrate sustainability-related topics into English language curricula, portraying what sustainability requires. The ultimate aim would be to enhance critical thinking on the part of students and develop global citizens for tomorrow's world. A main challenge that could be encountered is the lack of interest in dealing with sustainability-related concepts and topics in the English classroom.

As for studies on sustainability, Rudenko (2023) investigated methods of enriching environmental awareness on the part of students by incorporating sustainability issues into an English language course. The study's findings demonstrated that sustainability issues were usually limited to the environment, excluding social justice concerns from the curriculum. Based on the findings, Rudenko suggested re-conceptualizing the course framework and increasing ecological awareness.

Cordova (2024) explored the integration of SDGs into English language and literature teaching at a state university in the Philippines, examining the experience of pre-service teachers and gathering feedback from participants. The findings provided insights into how to make SDGs integration into language education a rich experience for students and a rewarding practice for trainers.

Erguvan (2024) assessed the impact of content-based instruction on learners' sustainability literacy. The sample covered first-year students who were taking an English composition course. Using a mixed-methods design, the study examined how integrating sustainability-related topics into language teaching could develop learners' comprehension of and involvement in sustainable practices.

To conclude, we are witnessing an era of globally unstable issues and concerns. Consequently, integrating the teaching of sustainability-related concepts and topics into EFL education would be essential to ensure quality outcomes.

3. Research Methods

Section three of the paper presents the study methodology that the author employed to achieve the research aims. Commencing with the

study design, the author employed a mixed-methods approach including quantitative and qualitative procedures for gathering data. To ensure clarity, this section sheds light on the study's participants, instruments, methods of data analysis, and ethical considerations.

3.1 Participants

This study was comprised of two categories; namely, EFL instructors and university students. Regarding the number of participants, the total number of participating students was one hundred and twenty-three, and the total number of participating instructors was twenty. No selection criteria were adopted in choosing the participating students, as the author included all the students she was teaching during the time of conducting this study. Regarding the participating instructors, all of them teach English at different universities in the United Arab Emirates. Approaching them was both possible and accessible. Tables 1 and 2 below present the participants' demographic data.

Table 1. Students' Demographic Data

Major	Gender	University Year	Number of Students
Software Engineering	Male & female	First & second	35
Artificial Intelligence	Male & female	First & second	22
Business Administration	Male & female	First	66

Table 2. Instructors' Demographic Data

Major	Highest Degree	Gender	Years of Experience	Number of Participants
English Linguistics	MA & PhD	Male & Female	8–32	9
English Literature	MA & PhD	Male & Female	10–18	3
TEFL/TESOL	MA & PhD	Male & Female	17–36	8

3.2 Instruments

The author designed a nine-item questionnaire including a five-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. Additionally, the author conducted an interview, raising two questions. Table three below demonstrates the study's questionnaire.

Table 3. The Study's Questionnaire

Item	Statement
1	Incorporating literature into English language courses may ensure sustainability in EFL acquisition.
2	Addressing SDGs in English language courses may ensure sustainability in EFL acquisition.
3	Including life skills in English language courses may ensure sustainability in EFL acquisition.
4	Integrating environment-awareness education into English language courses may ensure sustainability in EFL acquisition.
5	Embedding communication skills into English language courses may ensure sustainability in EFL acquisition.
6	Highlighting human values as an essential component of English language courses may ensure sustainability in EFL acquisition.
7	Utilizing technological advancements in English language education may ensure sustainability in EFL acquisition.
8	Tailoring English courses as per current trends may ensure sustainability in EFL acquisition.
9	Conducting KSD-oriented assessments may ensure sustainability in EFL acquisition.

The interview, on the other hand, raised the two questions below:

Interview Question 1: Is the role of EFL instructors essential in contributing to the realization of sustainability in English language acquisition?

Interview Question 2: If your answer to the first question is yes, discuss how EFL instructors at higher education institutions may contribute to achieving sustainability in English language acquisition.

3.3 Methods of Data Analysis

As mentioned above, this study involved two categories: English instructors and university students, and two study tools: a questionnaire and an interview. The study was conducted during the academic year 2024-2025 at the university where the author works. Before distributing the questionnaire and conducting the interview, the author explained the aims and importance of the current study. It is worth mentioning that while all the participants responded to the questionnaire, five instructors took part in the interview. Upon completion of data collection, the author used percentages for respondents' answers to the questionnaire and conducted a thematic analysis of the interviewees' answers to the interview.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Research ethics are the essence of quality outcomes. Having this in mind, the author emphasized that the steps she took while conducting this study adhered to research ethics as universally acknowledged. For example, the subjects' participation in the study was neither by force nor did it entail any gains to the subjects. Subjects' data and responses have been kept anonymous. Further, subjects are referred to as letters rather than names in the current paper. Lastly, the nature of this study did not impose any harm to the participants, such as

physical harm, amongst other types.

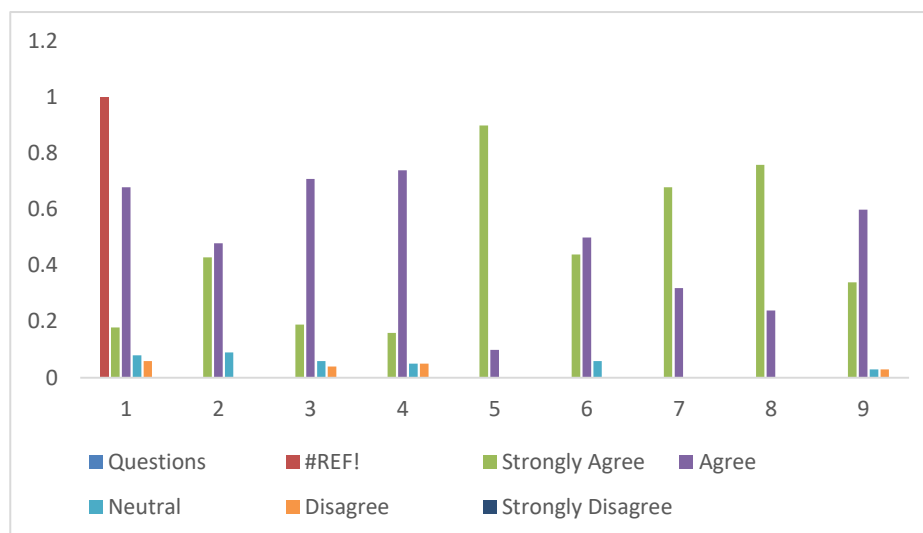
4. Study Findings

This section of the paper reports on the study findings. Table 4 & chart 1 reflect the results concerning the students' responses to the questionnaire, and table 5 & chart 2 reveal the results concerning the instructors' responses.

Table 4. Students' responses to the study's questionnaire

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	18%	68%	8%	6%	0%
2	43%	48%	9%	0%	0%
3	19%	71%	6%	4%	0%
4	16%	74%	5%	5%	0%
5	90%	10%	0%	0%	0%
6	44%	50%	6%	0%	0%
7	68%	32%	0%	0%	0%
8	76%	24%	0%	0%	0%
9	34%	60%	3%	3%	0%

Chart 1. Students' responses to the study's questionnaire



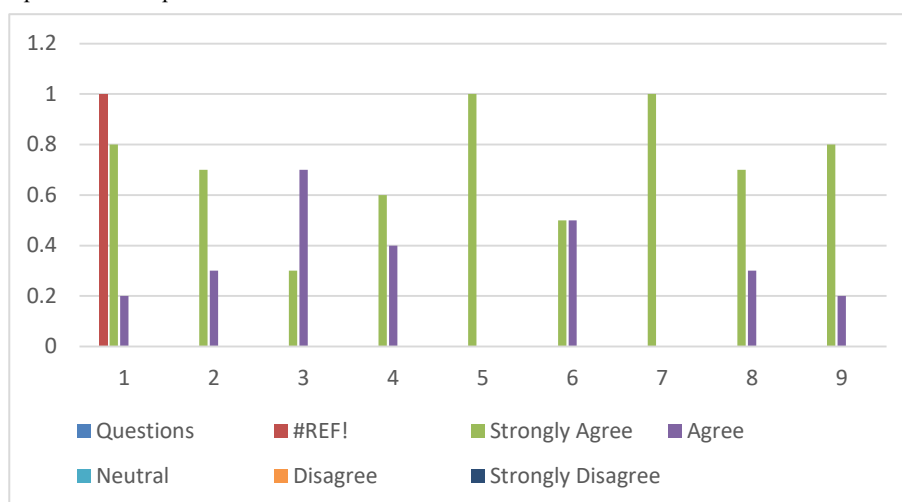
As table four and chart one demonstrate, for item one on whether incorporating literature into English language courses may ensure sustainability in EFL acquisition, 86% of the responses covering the values of strongly agree and agree indicated approval, 8% neutrality, and 6% disagreement. Regarding item two on whether addressing SDGs in English language courses may ensure sustainability in EFL acquisition, 91% of the responses covering the values of strongly agree and agree indicated approval and 9% neutrality. With respect to item three on whether including life skills in English language courses may ensure sustainability in EFL acquisition, 90% of the responses covering the values of strongly agree and agree indicated approval, 6% neutrality, and 4% disagreement. Concerning item four on whether integrating environment-awareness education into English language courses may ensure sustainability in EFL acquisition, 90% of the responses covering the values of strongly agree and agree indicated approval, 5% neutrality, and 5% disagreement. With regard to item five on whether embedding communication skills into English language courses may ensure sustainability in EFL acquisition, 100% of the responses covering the values of strongly agree and agree indicated approval. As for item six on whether highlighting human values as an essential component of English language courses may ensure sustainability in EFL acquisition, 94% of the responses covering the values of strongly agree and agree indicated approval and 6% neutrality. Moving to item seven on whether utilizing technological advancements in English language education may ensure sustainability in English language acquisition, 100% of the responses including the values of strongly agree and agree indicated approval. Regarding item eight on whether tailoring English courses as per current trends may ensure sustainability in EFL acquisition, 100% of the responses covering the values of strongly agree and agree indicated approval. Proceeding to the ninth item on whether conducting KSD-oriented assessments may ensure sustainability in EFL acquisition, 94% of the responses covering the values of strongly agree and agree indicated approval, 3% neutrality, and 3% disagreement.

Concerning the second category of subjects, EFL instructors, Table 5 and chart 2 below demonstrate the results.

Table 5. Instructors' responses to the questionnaire

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	80%	20%	0%	0%	0%
2	70%	30%	0%	0%	0%
3	30%	70%	0%	0%	0%
4	60%	40%	0%	0%	0%
5	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
6	50%	50%	0%	0%	0%
7	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
8	70%	30%	0%	0%	0%
9	80%	20%	0%	0%	0%

Chart 2. Instructors' responses to the questionnaire



As table five and chart two demonstrate, for item one on whether incorporating literature into English language courses may ensure sustainability in EFL acquisition, 80% of the responses indicated strong agreement and 20% agreement. Regarding item two on whether addressing SDGs in English language courses may ensure sustainability in EFL acquisition, 70% of the responses indicated strong agreement and 30% agreement. With respect to item three on whether including life skills in English language courses may ensure sustainability in EFL acquisition, 30% of the responses indicated strong agreement and 70% agreement. Concerning item four on whether integrating environment-awareness education into English language courses may ensure sustainability in EFL acquisition, 60% of the responses indicated strong agreement and 40% agreement. With regard to item five on whether embedding communication skills into English language courses may ensure sustainability in EFL acquisition, 100% of the responses indicated strong agreement. As for item six on whether highlighting human values as an essential component of English language courses may ensure sustainability in EFL acquisition, 50% of the responses indicated strong agreement and 50% agreement. Moving to item seven on whether utilizing technological advancements in English language education may ensure sustainability in EFL acquisition, 100% of the responses indicated strong agreement. Regarding item eight on whether tailoring English courses as per current trends may ensure sustainability in EFL acquisition, 70% of the responses indicated strong agreement and 30% agreement. Proceeding to the ninth item on whether conducting KSD-oriented assessments may ensure sustainability in EFL acquisition, 80% of the responses indicated strong agreement and 20% disagreement.

As far as the interview's results are concerned, the findings encompass three aspects for EFL instructors to focus on: teaching, research, and community engagement. In response to the first interview question on whether the role of EFL instructors is essential in contributing to the realization of sustainability in English language acquisition, the five interviewees' answers were positive. Moving to the second interview question on how EFL instructors at higher education institutions may contribute to achieving sustainability in English language acquisition, instructors A, B, and C asserted that by integrating SDGs into English courses, higher education institutions could empower students with the knowledge and skills they would need to meet sustainability requirements. Conducting co-curricular activities such as sustainability competitions and allocating one assignment per course for handling sustainability issues will increase students' awareness, arouse their motivation, and modify their practices positively. Instructors D and E confirmed the essential role conducting research projects would play, and instructors A, D, and E highlighted the role of community engagement in raising awareness and improving practices. Amongst the proposed community engagement initiatives are organizing outreach programs and providing volunteering services, to mention a few.

5. Conclusion

The current study addresses two research questions: what components should an EFL university course comprise to ensure sustainability in

English language acquisition, and what are the specifications of an EFL university course, designed to ensure sustainability in English language acquisition? In response to the first question, the findings reflect the need to incorporate literature, SDGs, life skills, environment-awareness education, communication skills, and human values into English language courses. In response to the second research question, the findings emphasize the need to utilize technological advancements, tailor English courses as per current trends, focus on students' research projects, encourage community involvement, conduct co-curricular activities, and implement KSD-oriented assessments.

There are several justifications for the findings outlined above. To begin with, an eternal legacy of civilization, literature remains man's symbol of creativity and intellectuality over the years. Therefore, incorporating literature into English language courses as an integral component will empower students linguistically, mentally, culturally, and professionally. This finding confirms several recommendations proposed by various researchers (see for example Martyushev, 2021; Erguvan, 2024). Commenting on the specifications for EFL courses, the wise utilization of technology would yield good outcomes, as technology has been invented and developed to assist humans in saving time, reducing effort, and ensuring quality. This belief goes in harmony with those of many researchers like Suleymanove et al. (2023), amongst other researchers. Tailoring the course according to current needs is also expected to ensure quality education, producing global thinkers and moral characters. Finally, adopting a KSD-based assessment will guide instructors to focus on both the teaching and assessment processes thoroughly and objectively.

6. Recommendations

Language has always served as our main means of communication and interaction. Studying a language, particularly a universal one such as English, will expose us to varied cultures and unique achievements other than ours. EFL education, therefore, should contribute to forming a global citizen who can think, evaluate, and respond to worldwide concepts such as sustainability locally, regionally, and universally. To ensure optimal outcomes, our definition of sustainability in English language acquisition should be revisited, addressing the points portrayed in this study, amongst others. This study, however, is limited to a sample of one hundred and forty-three subjects. Accordingly, it is recommended that more studies on the issues this paper deals with be implemented with larger samples.

Below are nine suggestions which may significantly contribute to sustainability in English language acquisition.

-Teaching Philosophy: The teaching philosophy should cater to students' needs and consider current issues.

-Motivation: Key to success is motivation. Thus, it should be educators' mission to arouse students' motivation intrinsically and extrinsically.

-Assessment: A KSD-based assessment should consider the criteria of reliability, validity, and credibility, enabling language educators to identify and handle students' areas of weakness.

-Pedagogical Approaches: In light of the learning outcomes, EFL instructors should choose the pedagogical approaches that would best meet students' needs, enabling them to become explorers of linguistic processes and investigators of global concerns.

-Involvement: Effective teaching practices prioritize the involvement of each student in the teaching and learning processes.

-Research Projects: To equip students with a repertoire of research skills, research projects should be an integral part of English courses. Through pair and group work, language learners can explore how to translate the vision of sustainability into action plans, which in turn would contribute to the welfare and growth of human societies.

-Community Engagement: To build and develop students' characters, initiatives such as awareness campaigns and sustainability competitions would ensure participants' growth linguistically, socially, and professionally, amongst other aspects.

-Utilization of Technological Advancements: Technology has transformed the procedures via which teaching and learning take place. Hence, enhancing students' digital knowledge and skills is essential.

-Educational Activities: Enrichment, remedial, and co-curricular activities such as reading forums, plays, debates, writing competitions, language games, blogs, intercultural projects, and virtual exchange projects amongst others have a pivotal role to play in terms of augmenting students' language skills and reshaping their characters for a bright future.

Presented below is a proposed framework on sustainability in EFL acquisition for EFL scholars and researchers to consider.

Sustainability in EFL Acquisition: University Courses (Components and Specifications)

Sustainability in EFL Acquisition: Components of English Language Courses							
Language Elements	Language Skills	English Literature	SDGs	Environment-Education Awareness	Life Skills	Communication Skills	Human Values
Sustainability in EFL Acquisition: Specifications for English Language Courses							
Students' Needs	Current Trends	Technology Utilization	Community Engagement	Co-Curricular Activities	Research Projects	Autonomous Learning	KSD-Oriented Assessment

On a final note, educators' mission in terms of empowering students with sustainability in English language acquisition has to delineate a futuristic representation of sustainability for a better future yet to come. To attain targets, pedagogical practices should be performance-focused and outcome-driven. Undoubtedly, every effort we exert today will blossom into fruitful outcomes tomorrow.

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No additional data are available.

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